

# Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) occurs when anxiety generalizes (or attaches) itself to anything and everything. People with GAD cannot just turn off the worrying or stop thinking anxious thoughts – if they could switch it off, they **would** have already.

## What are the symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder?

- Excessive anxiety and worry about a number of different activities or events
- Rumination (sticky thoughts) and other uncontrollable worrisome thoughts
- Physical tension, restlessness, fatigue, or poor or disturbed sleep
- Irritability, difficulty concentrating, dulling, or the mind going blank
- Gastrointestinal difficulties, such as stomachaches, nausea, and/or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Habits of avoidance
- Cognitive distortions - These are common thought patterns that create anxious thoughts about unknown situations, outcomes, and even other people's thoughts.
- Reassurance seeking - Anxiety can lead people to continuously ask questions, check in frequently with others, reach out for others' opinions when second-guessing their own, and engage in other ways of seeking reassurance and safety.

## What is the impact of generalized anxiety disorder?

*Generalized anxiety disorder impacts about 3% of the population and commonly occurs with depression, especially in older teens and adults. In a classroom of 35 kids, at least one child could be expected to have GAD. Nearly 10 million people in the United States likely have GAD.*

**Distress:** GAD typically involves chronic low level stress/discomfort that can increase in certain situations or settings, such as when a big report is due. (Note: As kids get older, they may express their worries less to others, particularly if they believe that their worries are abnormal.)

**Duration:** GAD is a pervasive thought pattern (or patterns). Those with GAD have it as a chronic condition: it affects them most of the time, most days.

**Interference:** GAD can impact functioning and satisfaction in schoolwork, friendships, and family functioning.

**Impairment:** Many sufferers of GAD are good at hiding it, and the impairment it causes may be difficult to identify. However, GAD often prevents people from fully enjoying their lives – it can keep them from trying new things, meeting new people, and going places.

## How is generalized anxiety disorder treated?

Like other forms of anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder may be treated with a cognitive behavioral approach. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) targets our thoughts, feelings/sensations, and actions. CBT therapists help those with anxiety begin to recognize what thoughts, feelings/sensations, and actions might be related to their anxiety.